

# LEADERSHIP – WHY SHOULD PEOPLE FOLLOW YOU?

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*“Effective leaders are made, not born. They learn from trial and error and from experience.”* - Colin Powell

All organizations rise and fall according to their leadership. Today, many companies, once giants in their industry, either no longer exist or are a mere shell of what they were at their peak. Kodak was the largest camera and film company in the world. Today Kodak barely rates a mention. Joseph Schlitz Brewing was once the largest brewery in the United States, larger than Anheuser-Busch. You may not have even heard of Schlitz. Many formerly successful organizations like these have crashed and burned, while others, due to leadership, have risen from the ashes.

There are hundreds of books and thousands of articles on leadership. Many of them focus on the qualities or traits a leader should possess. An article in Entrepreneur Magazine identified the following 22 traits leaders should possess.

1. Focus	9. Stoicism	16. Positivity
2. Confidence	10. Wonkiness	17. Generosity
3. Transparency	11. Authenticity	18. Persistence
4. Integrity	12. Open-mindedness	19. Insightfulness
5. Inspiration	13. Decisiveness	20. Communication
6. Passion	14. Personableness	21. Accountability
7. Innovation	15. Empowerment	22. Restlessness
8. Patience		

The key question is “Why Should People Follow You? Leadership is about getting everyone on the team working together toward common goals in which they believe, are committed to, and are excited about. The acronym TEAM says it all.

**Together  
We  
Accomplish  
More**

Would you follow someone if they possessed any or all of the above traits? If not, then what does a leader need for people to follow them?

Before addressing that question, let’s back up and define who is a leader, leadership as a skill, and what leaders do.

## **WHO IS A LEADER?**

You may or may not identify yourself as a leader depending on whether you have employees reporting to you, or what your idea of leadership is, but the fact is: *you are a leader*. Whether it's your business, your department, your family, your church, or your own career, if any part of its success depends on you, then you are a leader. Everyone is a leader in some facet of life.

## **LEADERSHIP IS A SKILL**

My good friend Ron Kirby does leadership training and consulting. The first thing he always says in his seminars is “No one is born a leader; leadership is a learned skill.”

You may argue that it comes easier to some people, but there is no question that leadership is a learned skill. Why? Because it is a skill on which you can improve. Ron has been training leaders for decades. He was a Sergeant Major in the Marine Corps. After he retired from the Marines, he was an executive with Best Buy. Now he has his own business and is the Senior Regional Director of the Hilton Head/Savannah Region for BNI (Business Network International). When he assumed this BNI position, only one chapter existed. Now the region is ranked among the most productive in the world. My chapter alone reported closed business from referrals of over \$8 million last year and was ranked the 10<sup>th</sup> most productive chapters in the world out of over 8,000 chapters. Worldwide there are over 220,000 members in BNI, and in 2016 their referrals resulted in closed business of \$11.2 billion.

Ron built his region by teaching and training people to be leaders. When Ron says that leadership is a learned skill, he knows what he is talking about. The people he has trained to be leaders are living proof that you too can become one.

The first and most important step for improving your leadership skill is to work on yourself. Each and every one of us has leadership potential in some form. You must take your own potential and mold yourself into the kind of leader on which everyone, and every part of your business, can depend. Developing and improving your leadership skills is part of what I call “Being the Best *You* That You Can Be.” When you are constantly learning, your potential is constantly increasing. Although there are many good books on leadership, there is really no substitute for “on the field” playing experience. You could do extensive reading on how to be a better tennis player, but until you get out on the court and play, you aren't going to improve. Is being a leader out of your comfort zone? Tough, do it anyway! You have a business to run, customers to satisfy, employees to train, and vendors to work with. If you are serious about building a successful business, then leadership is a responsibility you have to accept and a skill you must develop.

Where do you get the “on the field” playing experience? Non-profit organizations, churches, and civic clubs need your help. Leadership in a non-profit is different from leadership in a for-profit company because people in a non-profit are volunteers. Volunteers are there by choice. If they don’t like the leadership, they just leave. Being the boss and ordering employees around is not leadership. Real leadership is all about building a team committed to a common cause. Being a leader in a non-profit will hone your leadership skills. Start small by chairing a committee. You will make mistakes. That is growth, and it’s okay as long as you learn from your mistakes and determine to avoid them in the future. **It’s Not About Traits. It is about Skills. Great Leaders Learn Skills. You can learn Skills.**

## **WHAT DO LEADERS DO**

Simply put, leaders show the way and inspire people to follow. No matter what traits you have or whether you are an introvert or extrovert, you can become a better leader. What would inspire people to follow you? You will inspire people if they share your vision and beliefs. People will follow you IF:

1. ***They share your vision*** - If you don’t know where you are going, people can’t follow. Have a vision of where you want your organization to be in 10, 15, or 20 years. Your vision will evolve as your organization evolves. When a ship puts out to sea, it has to have a destination. The course could vary depending on weather, but it has to know the destination in order to plot a course. People will follow you if they are excited about where you are going.
2. ***They believe in your purpose*** - What is your organization's Fundamental Purpose other than making money. How do you contribute to society, improve people’s lives, and make the world a better place? Of course you have to make money in order to achieve your Fundamental Purpose, but just making money doesn’t inspire people. An exciting and meaningful purpose turns work into fun. People will follow you if they are excited about your purpose.
3. ***They have the same values*** – Fundamental Values lie at the heart of an organization’s identity, do not change over time, are not contrived, and are not a matter of convenience. They are the glue that holds the organization together and guides every decision. They may be moral or ethical in nature, but not necessarily. One of Joseph Schlitz Brewing Company’s values was “use only the best ingredients.” However, when they compromised that value and started using cheaper ingredients to boost profits, people stopped buying their beer and eventually they went out of business. **Never**, ever, compromise your values. People will follow you if they share your values.
4. ***They agree with your operating principles*** – Your Fundamental Operating Principles are basic strategies and philosophies that define how your business operates. Operating Principles are not SOP’s (standard operating procedures) but rather they are how your organization does things.

A good example is Southwest Airline's principle of only flying 737s which meant every pilot could fly every plane, every mechanic could work on every plane, and only one set of parts was needed. Nordstrom is fanatical about customer service. People will follow you if they like and believe in the way you operate.

5. ***They understand why*** – How do you feel when asked to do something and it makes no sense to you? Whether someone agrees with “why” you want to do something or not, they are much more inclined to follow you if they understand your reasoning.
6. ***They believe you care about them*** – Would you follow someone if you feel they don't really care about you as a person? Numerous studies have been done proving that appreciation is a greater motivator than money. Appreciation is more than a pat on the back. Appreciation means listening to people and their ideas. Give them credit if one of their ideas is adopted. If you can't implement their idea, then explain why.
7. ***They trust you*** – No need to elaborate here. People will follow you if they trust you. If people trust and embrace the decision process, they are more likely to trust and embrace the decision.

## **LEADERSHIP SKILLS**

What leadership skills do you need to develop? Here are a few.

- People skills
- Accept responsibility for, and learn from, mistakes
- Listen – we have two ears and one mouth, use them proportionally
- Help people grow – people want to know they have a future with your organization
- Embrace Contrary Opinions – You learn nothing when someone agrees with you

There are numerous books on leadership. Start with books by John Maxwell and Andrew Carnegie. As your leadership skills develop and you establish your Vision, Purpose, Values, and Operating Principles, you will:

- Improve cooperation across business functions
- Find the right employees
- Keep star employees
- Make consistent decisions
- Keep meetings on point

Improving your leadership skills is a lifelong journey, and the benefits to both yourself and your organization are well worth the time and effort. You may never be the best leader in the world, but you can always be better than you are now. As Don Brashears, Chair of the Bluffton, SC Chamber of

Commerce Board so eloquently stated: **“When you are finished learning and changing, you are FINISHED.”**

## **CONCLUSION**

Our original question was “Why should people follow you?” Cut out the box below and refer to it frequently.

### **PEOPLE WILL FOLLOW YOU IF:**

1. They share your Vision
2. They are excited about your Fundamental Purpose
3. They have the same Fundamental Values
4. They agree with and are comfortable with your Fundamental Operating Principles
5. They understand Why
6. They know you care about them
7. They trust you

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